

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

Sakalova-Tsvirko Y.V.

Belarusian State University, Minsk

Due to the processes of modern globalization and computerization, which characterize the Information Age we are living in now, High-Tech society requires a totally new outlook on different spheres of life. The Information Age (also known as the Computer Age, Digital Age, or New Media Age) is a period in human history characterized by the shift from traditional industry that the industrial revolution brought through industrialization, to an economy based on information computerization. The beginning of the Information Age is associated with the Digital Revolution, just as the Industrial Revolution marked the beginning of the Industrial Age [4].

Bringing about a fast evolution of technology in daily life, as well as of educational life style, the Information Age has allowed rapid global communications and networking to shape modern society. Communication plays a major part now.

So the question arises: What role does the English language that has its status as a world language play in the Information Society?

The present article is a logical continuation of the previous one, which discusses the problem of learning foreign languages in a modern world [3].

Undoubtedly, that to know a foreign language (in our case English) is a life necessity caused by its global significance in the society that faces the process of modern globalization [3, p. 298].

Taking into account its global significance and spheres of application [3, p. 297-298], the role of English in a modern world can be compared with Latin, which was used as the language of international communication, scholarship, and science until well into the 18th century, when it began to be supplanted by vernaculars [6].

According to John Gray [1, p.151-167], globalization and English are connected in three different ways.

In the first place, the rise of transnational corporations does much to promote the spread of English. Typically these organizations have headquarters located in Europe, North America or Japan, and geographically dispersed centers of production.

The examples of such corporations can be BMW, Coca-cola, General Motors, GlaxoSmithKline, IBM, Honda, Procter & Gamble, Philips, Renault, Tesco et al. [8].

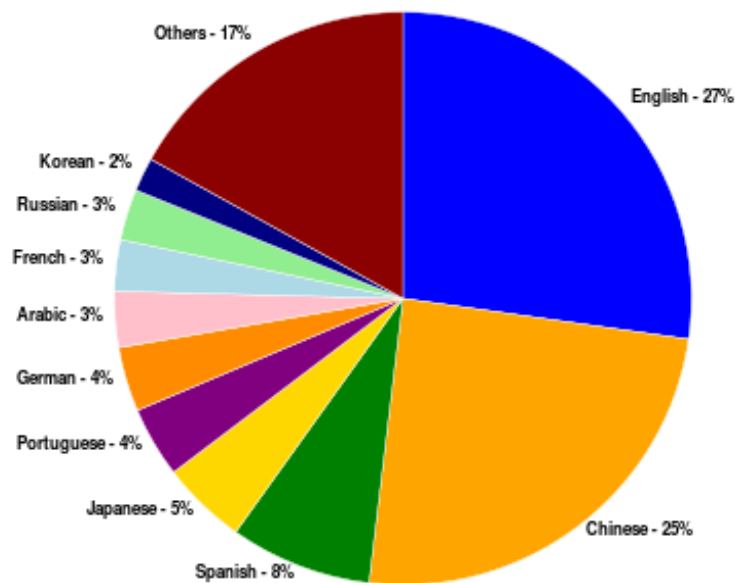
English is usually adopted as a lingua franca when transnational corporations enter into joint ventures with local companies in non-English-speaking countries. This implies that business and legal documentation are produced in English, for staff there should be oral and written communication skills training in English. All this only strengthens the position of English in today's world.

Secondly, the increase in the number of world organizations (e.g. the United Nations, World Health Organization, International Labour Organization, International Monetary Fund et al.), many of which are themselves involved in globalized networks, means that English continues to be in demand globally [7].

English functions as the working language of many international bodies and conferences, scientific and many other forms of academic publishing, international banking, international tourism, international law and human rights, information technology, and Internet communication.

The third area of English application is linked specifically to the Internet. English currently predominates on the Internet.

Image 1. Percentage of Internet users by language, data 2011



Source:<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:InternetUsersByLanguagePieChart.svg> (14.01.2015)

As evidenced above, English has been and is still the most commonly-used language in the web. Chinese is keeping its position as the second most common language on the Internet.

Taking into account the fact that in modern society the Internet is a main source of information, providing new opportunities for man, the spread of the Internet is increasing the domination of English throughout the world.

It can't be denied that if English is the most used language on the Internet, the Internet itself as a global network influences English.

Linguists and language teachers know that change is a part of any living language. Each generation of speakers of a language brings its own new words (neologisms) and language styles. Interaction with people from other areas, whether or not they speak the same first language, also means language change. For example, a new ethnic restaurant in a town brings new food vocabulary. So, developments in technology, new inventions, new industrial processes – these all add vocabulary. So, Internet communication certainly has brought and is still bringing and will be bringing changes to English.

This is an interesting time for English, linguistically. And luckily English has a great possibility for a change.

How different Internet-based interaction types are, including email, the Web, instant messaging (text-based chat with just one person), chat with multiple simultaneous participants, oral interaction online, with audio blogs and audio/video chat – all this contributes to a change in what English is.

For example, business email still incorporates polite forms and follows many business letter conventions. Business email writers are generally quite aware that their messages are, potentially, important documents that could win a promotion or result in being fired.

Academic web sites retain many elements of more formal writing.

But informal email, personal websites, and most other Internet situations move further from the conventions of formal writing and incorporate more elements of speech. Most importantly, there are currently few widely-accepted conventions governing language use on the Internet.

The lack of attention to grammar, punctuation, and spelling, and the use of abbreviations and orthographic changes based on sound in texting and instant messaging, social networking websites – all this characterize new forms of language, popularized in Internet Slang.

Table 1. Internet Slang

CUL8R	See you later
BTW	By the way
IMHO	In my humble opinion
HDU	How Dare You
ASAP	As soon as possible

Source: <http://internetslang.com> (14.01.2015).

More than just convenience in typing when writing online Internet Slang has brought certain changes to the English Language.

Internet Slang originated in the early days of the Internet with the purpose of saving keystrokes or to compensate for small character limits and have been popularized by Internet users. It can also be referred to as Internet shorthand, Cyber-slang, netspeak, chatspeak, or translexical phonological abbreviation [5].

Internet slang is characterized by brevity. This comes from the fact that one of the most important tasks of Internet slang is to save interlocutors' time and ease communication. Acronyms, keyboard symbols and abbreviations are common types of Internet slang.

An abbreviation is a shortening of a word, for example "CU", based on the sound effect.

An acronym is an abbreviation formed from the initial components in a phrase or a word. Examples of common acronyms include "LOL" for "laugh out loud" or "lots of love" and "BTW" for "by the way", "rofl" for "rolling on the floor laughing".

There are also combinations of both, like "CUL8R" for "see you later", "2G2BT" for "Too good to be true", "ih8it" for "I hate it", "4ever" for "forever".

Internet Slang is used in chat rooms, social networking services, online games, video games and in the online community.

However, while Internet Slang shortcuts save time for the writer, but being too unintelligible for less-advanced Internet users, they take two times as long for the reader to understand them, as evidenced below:

Table 2. Less-advanced Internet users need explanation of Internet Slang

BEASTLY	Being good at something, cool
AFAIK	As Far as I Know
TGIF	Thanks God it's Friday
LTNT	Like There's No Tomorrow
LOW KEY	Quiet or Don't tell anyone

Source: <http://internetslang.com> (14.01.2015).

There are Internet Slang dictionaries that contain approximately 9034 slang words [9]. There is also a special section for TopSlangTerms, trending slang words and acronyms.

Internet Slang facilitates our ability to communicate in ways that are fundamentally different from those found in other semiotic situations. It shows evolution of human communication

But, still the questions remain: How does Internet Slang influence language usage outside of technology? What impact does the Internet have on the future of English, and would it lead to a degradation of standard language usage?

Now the question can't be found and it can only be talked about positive and negative effects of Internet Slang on Standard English.

Surely, Internet allows better expressions of a language. Rather than established linguistic conventions, linguistic choices sometimes reflect personal taste. According to Constance Hall and Jessie Scanlon [2], language in Emails is being derived from "writing the way people talk", and there is no need to insist on Standard English. Language has always changed, and if it is adapting at an ever-increasing pace now, this is just evidence of how wonderfully imaginative and creative we humans can be! And... what sophisticated ideas can be expressed!

Table 3. Acronyms and their explanations

MTKFYTFO	For Me To Know, For You To Find Out
AKA	Also Known As
TO BOOT	As well, also
EOTWAWKI	End Of The World As We Know It
FOF	Full of Fail
TTTT	These Things Take Time
SELFIE	Picture of yourself, usually taken by yourself
NIAMY	Never In A Million Years
HOLLAND	Hope Our Love Lasts And Never Dies
H2CUS	Hope To See You Soon

NO-BRAINER	Something that requires no thought before deciding
KNOCKOUT	Stunning person or thing
COUCH POTATO	Lazy person who sits all day watching TV
DAGGY	Uncool, not trendy, untidy
BENJAMIN	\$100 bill

Source: <http://internetslang.com> (14.01.2015)

Abbreviations and slang are commonly used with mobile phone text messaging and emails due to the limited character space in mobile phones, and it makes texting easier.

Undoubtedly, the majority of us (and the author of the present paper is by no means an exception) frequently use lowercase “i” (instead of I) and a shortcut for “u” (instead of standard ‘you’) in short messages communication to save time and space. And this is also a language change.

But, of course in certain situations (real-life communication, academic classroom, learning environment, etc) the use of Internet slang and acronyms is totally inappropriate. So, instead of thinking of the answer to the question about ‘Slang and its influence on the language’, maybe we, as teachers, need to devote our energy to help students be aware of different styles of writing and communication, be appropriate with language usage according to the situation, not let Internet Slang penetrate in all spheres of students’ lives.

How long will English be predominant on the Internet and throughout the world?

In the 21st century, China is challenging America for the position of number one economic power in the world, but whether this will mean linguistic dominance remains to be seen.

English was preceded by Latin as the world’s dominant language, which was put in place by the Roman Empire and perpetuated by education and religion. But the days of Latin were cut short by the rise of the British and American empires.

So, only time will give an answer.

Bibliography

1. Gray J. The Global Coursebook in English Language Teaching // Globalization and Language Teaching; D. Block & D.Cameron (eds.). – London, 2002.
2. Hall C. & Scanlon J. Wired Style: Principles of English Usage in the Digital Age. – New York, 1999.
3. Sakalova Y. The Role and Values of Foreign Language Education in a Modern World // Podstawy edukacji. Sfera wartości i zasad – konstruowanie podmiotu; A.Gofron, K.Motyl (red.), T.6. –Krakow, 2013.
4. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_Age. – Date of access: 14.01.2015.
5. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_slang. – Date of access: 14.01.2015.
6. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latin>. – Date of access: 14.01.2015.
7. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_intergovernmental_organizations. – Date of access: 14.01.2015.
8. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_multinational_corporations. – Date of access: 14.01.2015.
9. <http://internetslang.com>. – Date of access: 14.01.2015.
10. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:InternetUsersByLanguagePieChart.svg>. – Date of access:14.01.2015.